Spirituality
Pencil Preaching

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“He called his disciples to himself” (Luke 6:12).

Col 2:6-15; Luke 6:12-19

A prayerful reading of the Letter to the Colossians reveals what scholars have noted in its language, so different from St. Paul’s familiar style. Like Ephesians, Colossians is Pauline in its themes, but it appears to be a rich distillation of his theology by a later disciple. Today’s passage emphasizes the paschal transformation that occurs at baptism, lifting disciples up from carnal existence into a spiritual state made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The baptized are freed from the power of sin to live the risen life with Jesus, already alive in the New Creation. “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk with him, rooted in him and built upon him …”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus selects the Twelve from the larger following of disciples after a night in prayer. It is as though his first task is to form a prototype community that will undergo the transformation Colossians describes, a group representing the full range of human potential and limitations. This “demonstration project” will be the leaven for the redemption Jesus will initiate by his passage to new life. While the focus is on the Twelve as stand-ins for the twelve tribes, others, including women followers, are surely part of the intimate circle Jesus invites to join him. If his redemptive purpose was clear, how could he not include both women and men in his test community?

This notion helps explain a key question about Jesus’ choice of Apostles. Why are they so flawed, conflicted and immature from the outset? Peter, the designated

leader, is indecisive, boastful and cowardly. James and John are short-tempered, ambitious and scheming. Thomas is full of doubts. Simon has zealot loyalties. Matthew was once a hated tax collector. Among the rest, Judas will betray his master to death. How the women fare in the group is left to the imagination, but the tensions are evident as crisis divides the group when Jesus is arrested and executed.

Yet, it is from this primitive community of witnesses that the believing church emerges. Their brokenness is exposed to the grace of Jesus' total self-sacrifice, which signals an outpouring of divine Mercy that begins the transformation of the world. As Colossians will later articulate, death's claim on sinful humanity is "nailed to the cross" so we can live in the company of the risen Christ. What Jesus accomplished is glimpsed and magnified in the first Beloved Community, the church sent to evangelize as they have been evangelized.

Salvation has always been a communal affair. Jesus does not act alone but immerses himself in others to show that holiness is less about personal virtue than about loving one another. If this mutual commitment is made while we are still sinners, then grace has something to work with.

We are that community now, not as loners, but as neighbors, brothers and sisters. Salvation begins when we surrender our lives to one another, where Jesus waits to teach us how to love him by loving one another.